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ABSTRACT

A preliminary training and evaluation program was initiated by the Houston Area Agency on Aging. Several pilot training programs were tested, and information was gathered on the current and desired training status of personnel in service-providing agencies. Inspection of obective and subjective reports suggests that future training programs should focus on job-relevant issues and content rather than on general training in gerontology. Trainees in the pilot program indicated a preference for loosely structured, discussion-format training sessions over both traditional college courses and on-the-job (apprentice) training. Of critical importance for successful training was the advance preparation of printed instructional materials to be used by trainees as study aids. Suggestions for future development include the creation of instructional kits for on-site use, extensive job analyses of first- and second-level jobs, and the development of multi-level training courses in relevant areas. (Author)

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A PILOT TRAINING PROGRAM AND EVALUATION OF TRAINING FOR AN AREA AGENCY ON AGING

Paper presented to the meeting of the

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Central to the concept of an Area Agency on Aging is the appropriate training at all levels of personnel who provide aging services. There is a clear need for education in the basic skills necessary for administration of programs: management, accounting procedures, legal and consumer information, as well as need for acquaintance with the basic concepts of sociology, psychology and social work as they affect the elderly adult. Familiarity with basic gerontological concepts make the dispensing of needed services easier and more enjoyable for both agency staff and elderly clients. Recognition of the need for such training, however, is only the first step in establishing a viable training program for service providers and elderly consumers. This report describes the state of the art in the Houston area in the training of service providing personnel, and some preliminary steps taken during the summer of 1977 to establish a training program tailored to the needs of the aging services network in Houston.

Prior to the implementation of the program described herein, training for service personnel in Houston was conducted in sporadic fashion by sending staff members to training outside Houston, or by commissioning trainers from other areas to come to Houston and conduct a training session. There was no overall plan for the training and career development of service providing personnel. With the formation of a separate Area Agency on Aging for Houston in January, 1977, plans were made to begin training in Houston by local trainers. The initial proposal called for an analysis of the target trainee population,

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an analysis of the job requirements of that population, and a determination of the types of training most needed by service providing agencies, both on a short term and long term basis. Several pilot programs were then implemented in content areas thought to be most needed: management skills, sociology of aging, consumer information and legal aid, and life span approaches to

gerontology. The experiences of the trainees participating in these programs, and the evaluation of both the content and process of the training are the subjects of this report.

Trainees participating in training during the summer of 1977 were predominantly supervisory level employees, and were primarily from service providing agencies with a staff of 10 or more. Due to time constraints, all the available training programs were compressed into a 10 week space, thus making it impossible for any one person to attend all training, and making it difficult for trainees to attend all sessions on a particular subject. Because the training was a pilot program, participants were present on a voluntary basis, perhaps at the request of a supervisor or agency director.

Prior to and during the training programs, a needs analysis questionnaire was distributed to supervisory level employees of service providing agencies. (See Slide 1) Of a potential 29 agencies, 14 produced completed questionnaires. The questionnaire was primarily meant to assess need for training content, but some information was also gathered on the process of training; that is, the type of classroom format and materials desired by potential trainees.

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Agencies completing the needs analysis questionnaire were divided into two groups: small agencies providing mostly counseling, referral, companionship and other general services (Class A, n=9) and larger agencies providing more specific professional services such as medical, nursing or nutritional care (Class B, n=5).

In order to more meaningfully determine content needs, the content areas listed on the needs analysis questionnaire were grouped into clusters for the purposes of analysis. These groupings are described in Slide 2.

Slide 3 about here

Due to sample size, only non-parametric statistics were conducted on the needs analysis data. Significant correlations were found between Class A and Class B on the total number of responses; that is, the Class B agencies had the greater number (r= -.63, p .05). Using the Friedman 2-way non-parametric ANOVA, a significant difference was found between Class A and Class B training , with Class B agencies receiving more training. For Class A current vs. desired training yielded a significant correlation (r=.65, p .05), while the same comparison for Class B was nonsignificant, but in the expected direction (r=.23). The sample was too small to permit either parametric statistics or an item analysis of the individual clusters.

Even though these results are limited, they suggest that for small, multi-purpose agencies, little training is received while much is desired, and that for larger agencies with a well-defined purpose, the discrepancy is not as large. The difference in total number of responses suggests that personnel in the larger agencies may be more aware of the type and scope of possible training, and more able to judge the applicability of various types of training for their agencies. Smaller agencies had not had as much opportunity to experience a variety of training as larger agencies, and thus the smaller agencies were not in as good a position to judge either what was available or what is needed.

Trends for both received and desired training by groupings are indicated in Table 3 (Slide 3). The indicated rankings are approximations only, but give some information about the relationship between received and desired training. The most salient result to be drawn from Table 3 is the clear preference of the service personnel for Cluster 5 training: legal and financial problems. In addition, the lack of desire for Cluster 1 training (management) together

with the indicated lack of current training in Cluster 1 skills was a source of concern for the AAA staff. Management and budgetary skills had been given the highest priority for the pilot training program, and were felt by the AAA to be the type of training most needed by service providing agencies.

The final result gathered from the needs analysis was a clear preference by trainees for printed instructional materials, either as aids to a lecture or seminar, or as self-contained instructional units, to be administered within an agency by a trainee's supervisor or by the trainee himself. Trainees indicated a desire for occasional workshops and seminars, but not at the expense of printed instructional materials.

Given the results of the above analysis, plus objective and subjective reports on the training programs conducted thus far, some conclusions can be drawn regarding the successes and failures of the summer's training.

It is apparent that one of the difficulties plaguing the summer training program was the conducting of many different training classes within a short space of time. Trainees could not adequately cover all available training and at the same time maintain efficiency on their jobs. The time constraints were a necessary consequence of funding restrictions which by hindsight might have been avoided, and should not occur in future training programs. Because of unfortunate timing of training sessions, however, attendance was relatively low, and those persons able to attend training sessions were largely from agencies with sufficient staff to allow the absence of one or more employees several days a week.

The content of training sessions was chosen for the initial pilot program with priorities of the funding sources in mind. At no time was the initial series of training courses meant to be a comprehensive plan for the Houston area. Subjective reports from trainees, trainers and various administrators suggest that it may be more beneficial in the short run to concentrate training in several content areas which have a high probability of success, and not attempt to serve all training needs at once. Since the priorities of the service

providers and the AAA differ, however, careful consideration must be made in which content areas to continue training.

There is a set of larger issues that became apparent in the pilot training program that are common to most continuing education programs. The request by service providers for printed materials illustrates one of these issues: the need for in-service training programs to provide printed or audio-visual referents for material verbally presented. Skills developed by the average full time student such as note-taking, text and lecture organization, and outside study are not practical skills for an in-service training setting. It is unrealistic to expect adults working in a service agency to develop these skills for use during a short training program. Consequently, organizational and memory aids must be provided by the training program itself, in order for training to be effective.

An additional issue relevant to in-service training is the planning of the time and location of training well in advance of the training session. A need is also apparent for active advertisement of training programs, to insure that potential trainees know both the time and location of the training, as well as a general outline of what will be presented. Advance registration of trainees would be ideal, and has been done in cities with much larger trainee populations.

IV. Recommendations for the future

Because of the pilot programs conducted, the training program is now in a position to make realistic short and long term plans for the Houston area. The plans outlined below are the results of statistical analyses, objective and subjective reports on training, and priorities set by the AAA.

A. Short term plan — Slide 4 about here

First priority should be given to the development of an administrative

staff for the training programs. Based on the summer's experience, the staff should consist of at least a full-time administrator and secretary, possibly with evaluation procedures carried out on a part-time basis by a third staff member. Administration and evaluation of the program should be conducted by separate people, to avoid contamination and insure that the highest quality training will result.

Second priority should be given to developing the resources available for training programs. Already prepared printed and audiovisual resources are available for most of the content areas taught, and ample resources in other areas are available from sources such as North Texas State. Through the use of such resources, the trainingprogram would be able to reach many more service providers and consumers faster and cheaperthan theuse of a seminar-workshop format.

Third priority should be placed on preparing orientation kits for consumers, advisory board members and new staff members in service providing, agencies, as well as for trainers teaching subjects not directly connected with aging. In all these cases, the target population needs to become quickly familiar with the aging network, administrative agencies, service providing agencies and some basic gerontology. A readily available orientation kit would provide this information quickly and head off needless frustration and anxiety.

Fourth priority should be placed on developing a long range plan for service providers and elderly consumers in the Houston area, such that by 1980 all service providers will receive necessary training in whatever skills a particular job requires, and consumers will have access to training programs in basic gerontology, psychology, nutrition, legal aid, and any other topic relevant to the elderly consumer.

B. Long term plan

Central to the success of a long term plan for training is the development of appropriate evaluation procedures. Not only are evaluations needed for specific training sessions, but to be effective the training program must undertake assessment of the training needs of service providing agencies through the use of job analysis and work sample techniques. Each job type has specific training needs, and these needs should be clearly articulated so that persons currently holding that job may receive any additional training necessary, and so that prerequisite skills can be demanded of those seeking that particular job in the future. Results of this type of evaluation will motivate academic institutions to train students to meet job requirements, and thus eventually decrease the training load for in-service training programs.

Evaluation of existing training must also be conducted on several levels. First, evaluation of content learned and transfer of that content to a work situation must be done. Secondly, pre-post measures of satisfaction with training and suggestions for improvement should be integrated with the level of training and the skills and experience of the trainee. The results of these types of evaluations will be an improvement in the in-service training programs by eliminating unnecessary content and molding the training to the specific needs of trainees. Ideally, instruction will be given in skills and knowledge known to be useful in an applied setting, and academic knowledge and theory will be presented only when necessary for understanding.

A second issue to be considered in a long range plan is the development of training sites and the necessary resources and equipment to administer training. Training sites used for the pilot program will not be adequate for an extended training program, and many service providers require that training take place closer to their agencies. The concept of roving trainers seems to better fit the needs of the target population than the establishment of one or two central locations.

A third issue to be considered is the establishment of grades or levels of training, and appropriate acknowledgement of a trainee's satisfactory completion of training. A staff member who has attended all the available training in a particular content area and completed all necessary requirements can be considered skilled in that area and should be recognized as skilled. The establishment of levels of training should be closely integrated with evaluation of training content to insure that completion of a series of training sessions indicates mastery of the material. The burden of proof should be on the training program and the trainer in guaranteeing content mastery.

A fourth and final issue to be considered is the comparison of training being conducted in Houston with training taking place in other metropolitan areas. New York, Philadelphia and other large cities have substantial in-service training programs already in place. Houston's training program can benefit from the mistakes and successes of others, and it would be an error to ignore the development of these other programs by concentrating too much on local problems. Site visits to other cities by the administrator of the training programs in Houston could accomplish a lot by comparison alone.

Since the pilot training program described thusfar ended in September, 1977, little has been attempted in the way of planning or implementation of a comprehensive training program for Houston. This past summer, 1978, some management training was conducted by a local consulting firm, and the trainers also provided consultations to agencies with particular problems. It is our feeling, however, that training should not be limited to management, however important a topic it may be. A comprehensive plan is needed, one that establishes training for multiple levels of employees, as well as several grades or levels of training. This need is currently not being satisfied by local colleges and universities, and in most cases, in-house training programs cannot provide the range of training ideally needed by the Houston aging network.

Content of Slides

Slide 1: schematic of agencies served by Houston AAA

Slide 2: needs analysis questionnaire

Slide 3: content groupings and current vs. desired training

Slide 4: short and long term goals

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NEEDS ANALYSIS

Organization _____
Number of staff members _____

CURRENT TRAINING

1. What method (s) of training are currently available to your organization? (check all that apply)
   a) ___on the job experience
   b) ___training manual or other printed information
   c) ___ training classes
   d) ___occasional seminars or refresher courses
   e) ___college courses
   f) ___other _____

2. What types of training currently are available to your organization?

category	method (a,b,c,d or e above)
___bookkeeping or accounting	___
___management skills	___
___supervisory skills	___
___sociology of aging	___
___problems of minority elderly	___
___social work skills	___
___ psychology of aging	___
___counseling skills	___
___interviewing skills	___
___legal problems of the elderly	___
___government programs and benefits	___
___nursing home care	___
___nutrition	___
___medicine	___
___first aid	___
___financial problems of the elderly	___
___job opportunities for the elderly	___
___other _____	___

FUTURE TRAINING

1. What types of training would your organization benefit from most within the next 6 months? (check all that apply)

___bookkeeping or accounting
___management skills
___supervisory skills
___sociology of aging
___problems of minority elderly
___social work skills
___psychology of aging
___counseling skills
___interviewing skills
___legal problems of the elderly
___government programs and benefits
___nursing home care
___nutrition
___medicine
___first aid
___financial problems of the elderly
___job opportunities for the elderly
___other _____

2. What method(s) of training would work best in your organization? (check all that apply)

___on the job experience
___training manual or other printed information
___training classes
___occasional seminars or refresher courses
___college courses
___other _____

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Table 2

CLUSTERS OF CONTENT AREAS FROM NEEDS ANALYSIS QUESTIONNAIRE

Cluster	Content areas
1	Management, bookkeeping, supervisory skills, volunteerism
2	Sociology, social work, minority elderly
3	General psychology, counseling, interviewing
4	Medicine, first aid, nutrition, nursing
5	Legal and financial problems, jobs, etc.

Table 3

RANK ORDERING OF CLUSTERS FROM NEEDS ANALYSIS QUESTIONNAIRE

CURRENT TRAINING

Most				Least
3	5 2	4		1

DESIRED TRAINING

Most			Least
5	4	1 2	3

Sample members, Needs Analysis Questionnaire

Class A

1 Sheltering Arms
2 City of Katy
3 North Harris County College
4 Department of Aging--St. Dominic's
5 Northwest Community Senior Citizens
6 Senior Citizens Center
7 Rice University TexPIRG
8 Settegast Community Action Association
9 Golden Age Hobby House

Class B

1 TRIMS
2 Visiting Nurses Association
3 Harris County Senior Citizens Project
4 Family Service Center
5 Houston Metropolitan Ministries

Summary Statistics performed on Needs Analysis data

Spearman r

Class A-Class B total number of responses (Class B questionnaires had the greater number of responses) $r = -.63$ $p < .05$

Class A current training vs. desired training $r = .55$ $p < .05$

Class B current training vs. desired training $r = .23$ (N.S.)

Mann-Whitney U

Class A-Class B received training, MWU = 11 (N.S.)

Class A-Class B desired training, MWU = 10 (N.S.)

Friedman 2-way ANOVA (non-parametric)

Class A-Class B received training k=5 (content clusters), n=2 (class A,B) $\chi^2 = \leq 5.6$, $p=.05$

Class A-Class B desired training, k=5, n=2 $\chi^2 = \leq 4.8$, $p=.21$ (N.S.)

Wilcoxon Sign Ranks Test

sample too small to permit reliable conclusion